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ABSTRACT

Listening is one of the most crucial skills in the classroom for student as well as teacher, yet both students and teachers are left to their own devices in learning this skill. Since the vast majority of learning in school requires extensive and intensive listening abilities, students must be assured the skill with which to listen and learn. Teachers must also be effective listeners, but they cannot practice what they have not been taught. Few preservice or inservice teacher training programs incorporate listening into their programs. The foundation for listening instruction is found in the process model prevalent in current listening literature and is grounded in a continuum of listening stances, from defensive to supportive. This model offers students and teachers a perspective from which they can identify their classroom responses, locate their stance and determine how to modify their listening to achieve a supportive classroom. (Five figures of data are included; and 50 references and an appendix containing a survey of textbooks on teachers as communicators are attached.) (RS)

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TEACHERS AS LISTENERS:

An Exploration

by

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> This is a story about four people: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it; but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it; but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when actually Nobody asked Anybody.
>
> (Author Unknown)

Listening is an integral part of the educational process. Ironically, listening is so deeply imbedded in education that the specific skill is often forgotten, neglected and just plain ignored. This paper explores the teacher as listener. While it seems obvious that students listen to learn and teachers listen to teach, the nature and function of listening by teachers has received little scholarly attention. This paper argues that effective teachers do listen in the classroom. A demand for explicit listening instruction has developed within the curricular reform movement of the past decade. Consequently, teachers are now expected to teach listening. At present, however, listening skill deficiencies are widespread among both students and teachers. In the course of proposing a developmental model for listening education for students, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers, this paper also presents a model for examining teachers' listening "stance."

LISTENING INSTRUCTION DEVELOPS A PLACE

Developing listening instruction in the schools is not a new idea. The national office of the National Council of Teachers of English has been calling for listening instruction since 1949 (Anderson, 1949; Fitzgerald, 1986).

The idea of teaching students to listen began to receive more widespread attention as a consequence of a movement to re-define the "basic skills" (Wolvin, 1984; Rubin, 1985). In the early 1970's, a "back-to-basics" movement arose as a reaction to the SAT scores decline and the curriculum diversification of the previous decade. Eighteen subject-based professional education organizations responded by forming the Organizations for the Essentials of Education, to publish a pamphlet entitled, "The Essentials in Education: A Call for Dialog and Action," in 1976. This manifesto challenged the simplistic notion that the 3R's are the only basics needed in school, calling for a more precise definition of what knowledge and skills are essential to functional citizens in modern, complex society (Organizations for the Essentials in Education, 1976). Two years later, Congress passed Public Law 95-561, the Education Amendments of 1978, which established a legal definition of <u>basic skills</u> including "effective oral and written communication". The phrase, "effective oral communication," is generally recognized as a process employing the skills of <u>speaking</u> and <u>listening</u>.

Since the enactment of P.L. 95-561, virtually every major educational policy statement published has identified speaking

and listening as basic skills. The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto (Adler, 1982) forcefully presented a philosophical basis for the place of speaking and listening in education. Five major educational policy statements followed:

Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983);

Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do (The College Board, 1983);

Action for Excellence (Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, 1983);

High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America Ernest Boyer (Carneigie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching, 1983);

To Strengthen Quality in Higher Education (National Commission on Higher Education Issues. 1983);

all included attention to the skills of speaking and listening. In 1984, the National Association of Secondary School Principals published a curriculum report entitled "Speaking/Listening: Much Used, Little Taught," calling for a "balanced curriculum" (p. 8). Most recently, the Council for Middle Level Education published an educational agenda including a call for explicit speaking and listening instruction in middle and junior high schools (1986). At the policy level, the place of speaking and listening is firmly implanted in the curriculum; instructional practice in the schools is another matter.

LISTEN TO LEARN: LEARN TO LISTEN

Students must listen to learn in the classroom and to succeed in subsequent careers. While this appears to be self-evident, the skill of listening remains ignored in most educational literature.

Being a student is primarily an aural role. Modern school practices usually place students in the position of receivers. In grades 1 through 12, students are expected to spend from one-half to two-thirds of the average classhour listening to instruction, explanations, directions and assignments. In most college classrooms, students are expected to listen with even higher levels of skill for entire class sessions. Students who cannot listen cannot learn, or waste considerable effort in learning, what the teacher expects to impart. In fact, students who get good grades are not smarter; they listen better.

Upon graduation, young people enter a job market which places an even greater premium on listening skill. Employees need to listen in order to acquire the information necessary to work and to make decisions. From an entry level position in which listening to directions is a survival skill, the competent young employee may climb the ladder of success if he or she can meet the increasing demands for the complex listening skills needed to relate to people on the job. As employees move up into the ranks of management, the demands on a manager's listening time increase to 70 or 80 percent of each workday (Wolvin and Coakley, 1985). A growing number of

businesses are learning that poor employee listening throughout the nation causes losses estimated conservatively at one to two billion dollars a year. Many major corporations, such as Sperry, General Motors, 3M, and Ford, are developing special employee training programs in listening (Wolvin and Coakley, 1985). Both in school and after school, young people need increasingly complex levels of listening skill. Youngsters must listen, and be listened to, in order to grow into a successful adults. However, listening remains ignored in most schools.

TEACHERS MUST LISTEN.

"Teachers listen? You've got to be kidding. Teachers talk; they don't listen." Such is the image of teachers as communicators both in the popular image and in the academic literature.

While teachers are commonly characterized as talkers, we know intuitively that effective teachers listen. Donald Dedmond declares, "teachers must be able communicators" (p.20). He describes teaching in the following terms:

> The heart of the teaching transaction is skilled oral communication. Teachers must consistently practice these and encourage the practice of them by their students. <u>The good teacher is both a good speaker and a good listener. The latter may, indeed, be more important than the former.</u> Why this conclusion should be so difficult for so many to arrive at never ceases to fascinate me, for evidence of this truth is all about us.[emphasis added] (p.19)

Effective teachers listen to check themselves, to acknowledge each student, to monitor student progress, to model listening for students, and to demonstrate authentic empathy.

The effective teacher uses self-listening as a means of maintaining intrapersonal contact with himself or herself, and as a means of monitoring his own teaching performance. A teacher out of contact with self is in danger of being out of control of both himself and the classroom. When a teacher does not pay attention to what he is saying, how he is saying it, and what his performance communicates to the students, he is ignoring consequences which may interfere with learning or may cause even more serious classroom problems.

Basic acknowledgement of the speaker is an essential part of communication especially in teaching. In listening to the student speaker, the teacher acknowledges his or her existence, value and participation. Acknowledgement is an existential act. All human beings need to have their existence acknowledged and validated. All students need to have their existence and their participation acknowledged; to meet that need, a teacher must listen -- respond to the person -- initially without qualitative judgement. Each student -- each human being -- needs daily experience of acknowledgement. Without the acknowledgement which comes through genuine listening, other learning is meaningless.

Also crucial to the process of teaching is the teacher's ability to monitor student progress. If a teacher does not listen to his students, he cannot know what each already knows or doesn't know, how each learns, how each is progressing, or how to interest each in the subject. Teachers who depend solely on test scores risk becoming graders rather than

teachers. By listening, teachers identify misunderstandings and difficulties so that they can provide appropriate support; similarly, they can identify student successes and encourage further success.

More powerful dimensions of teaching are found in a teacher's ability to model effective listening behaviors and to demonstrate authentic empathy. Modeling is one of the most powerful methods of teaching. From earliest childhood, we learn most by observing and imitating. A teacher, whether he or she likes it or not, functions as a model of adult behavior and academic competence. Each teacher constantly models listening behavior for his or her students, and the students's own listening skills improve, as should be expected, just insofar as the teacher acts as an effective model listener. A teacher who listens relates student responses to his presentation, while the non-listening teacher ignores student responses. Again, as should be expected, students respond more favorably to the teacher who listens.

Furthermore, just insofar as the listening is sincere, just insofar as mere acknowledgement gives way to true empathy, students experience profoundly personal invitations to listen to themselves -- and to learn.

Finally, a teacher's empathy can do something for more than facilitating classroom learning: it fosters the trust that encourages students to seek guidance in serious extra-curricular matters -- if only when such guidance comes from a sounding board. Many students have noted the most

significant change in their lives have occurred when a teacher listened empathically. One expert reflecting on teenage suicides warns us that kids are literally dying to be heard. The teacher who can model effective listening behaviors and demonstrate authentic empathy is the teacher who makes a positive difference in the lives of students.

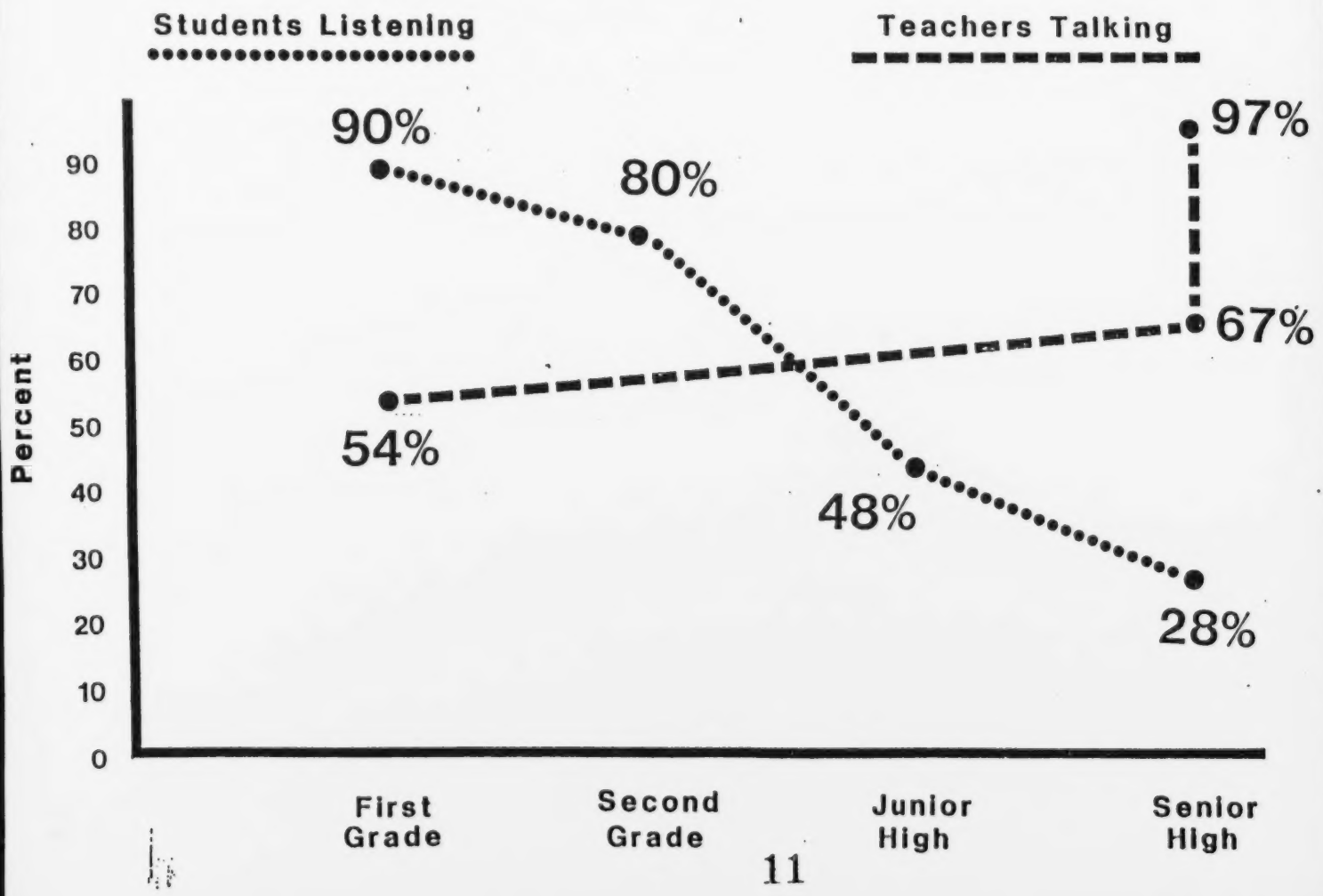
LISTENING SKILL DEFICIENCIES ARE WIDESPREAD.

Most students and teachers presently suffer from serious deficiencies in listening skills (Phillips, et al, 1970, p. 15). The present curriculum rarely provides for explicit listening instruction. Instead, the curriculum proceeds on the assumption that constant exposure to teachers' talking will provide students with natural or automatic lessons in listening. Consequently, many students and teachers, being surrounded by poor listeners, learn bad listening habits. This is arguably one cause of the poor academic performance currently the subject of nationwide attention.

Tragically, the assumption that listening skills develop spontaneously has proven invalid. When untrained students have been checked to determine whether or not they were listening to a teachers' discourse, the number of untrained students actually listening eroded as the grade level advanced (Nichols and Stevens, 1957) [see Figure 1]. If students cannot listen to assignments, instructions and explanations, their learning performance must suffer (Swanson, 1984). The failure to teach students explicitly how to listen in a developmentally sound curriculum may well be one of the causes of the pervasive decline in students' academic performance.

Figure #1

Teachers Talking & Untrained Students Listening

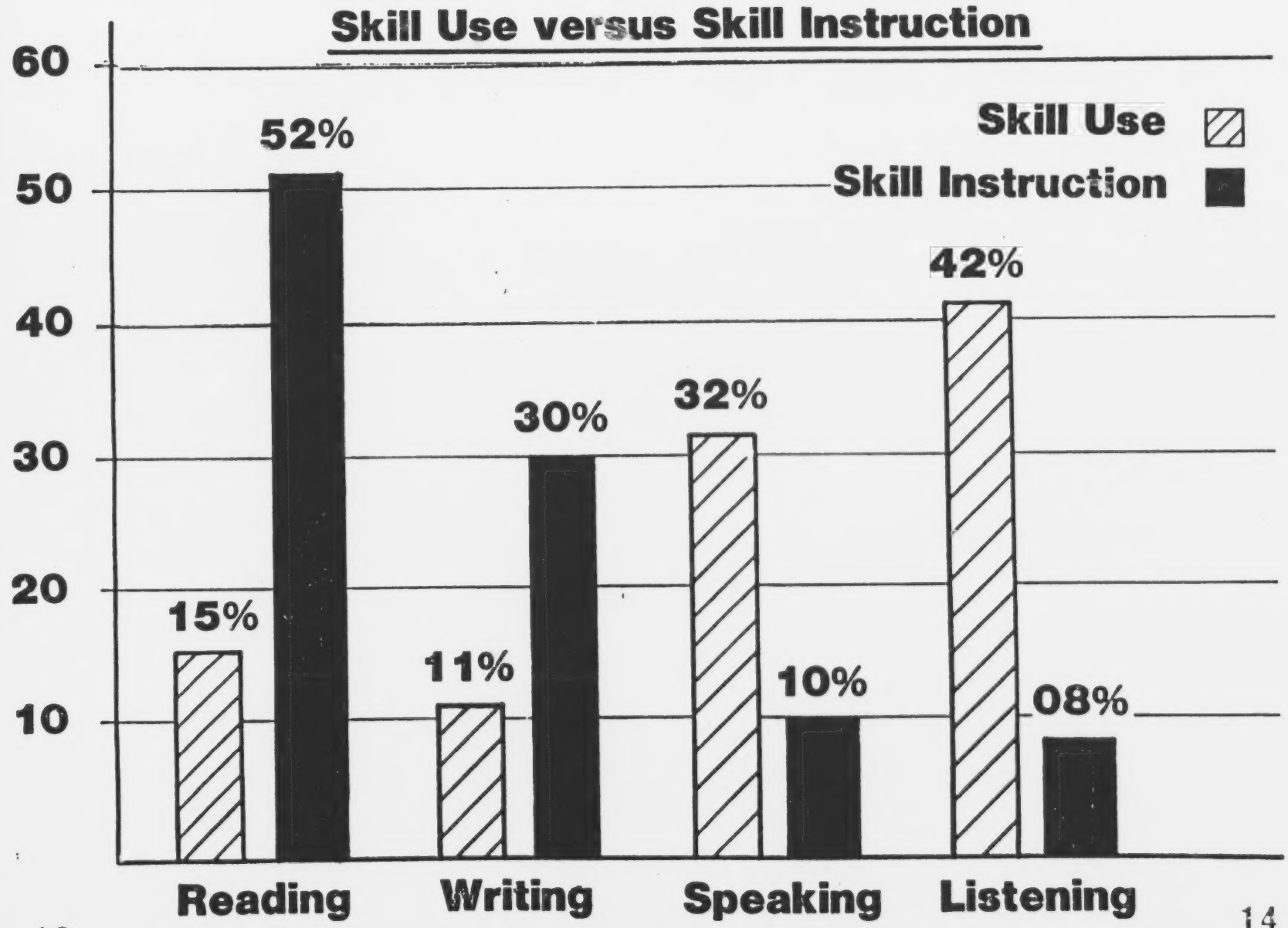


In a classic 1927 study, Paul Rankin found that the average adult spent about 70 percent of each waking day using one or more communication skills; he called this period a communication day, Rankin also discovered that the average adult spent about 75 percent of each communication day using the skills of speaking and listening -- 43 percent listening and 32 percent speaking. Yet, when Rankin examined the instructional time devoted to each of the four basic communication skills -- reading, writing, speaking and listening -- he found that the schools spent the vast majority of their instructional time on the skills which are used the least (Rankin, 1928) [see Figure 2]. Replicating studies over the past sixty years have shown that the phenomena discovered by Rankin remain essentially unchanged (Steil, et al, 1983, p. 5). Such a disparity between skill use and skill instruction must be called an "inverted curriculum."

The pervasiveness of the "inverted curriculum" extends into the vast majority of teacher education programs. While most teachers spend a considerable portion of every working day using their skills of speaking and listening, most teacher education programs provide little explicit instruction in those essential skills.

Most students appear enter and exit teacher education programs with no listening training. Prospective teachers come from high schools which do not offer consistent instructional programs in the skills of speaking or listening (Landry). In fact, a majority of American high schools offer

Figure #2


Skill Use versus Skill Instruction
60
50
40
30
20
10
Skill Use
Skill Instruction
52%
15%
11%
30%
32%
10%
42%
08%
Reading
Writing
Speaking
Listening

no courses in speech. When offered, high school speech courses (with such titles as speech, speech communication or oral communication) are electives avoided by most students. High schools offering even an elective course in listening are extremely rare (Steil, 1977; NASSP, 1984). Thus, most students enter collegiate teacher education programs with little or no prior training in speaking or listening.

Far too few teacher education programs offer any explicit communication skills training. In 1976, Lynn reported studies which identified only 94 out of 233 (39 percent) undergraduate institutions having a course dedicated to teacher communication skills. Those same studies revealed graduate level courses on teacher communication in 92 out of 233 (39 percent) institutions. In a recent survey, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education discovered that out of its 585 member institutions, only 2 colleges reported any kind of entrance requirement in communication skills; the study failed to indicate how many institutions are teaching their pre-service teachers about teacher communication and teacher listening (AACTE Briefs, 1985). Evidently, the majority of teacher education programs are developed on the hidden assumption that teachers need no specific training in communication skills.

Students who do take a teacher communication course might receive some instruction in listening (Vogel). Lynn's report of classroom communication courses includes a listing of representative course content, in which listening figured

negligibly. A similar absence of listening instruction is found in Canadian teacher communication courses (Edwards).

Textbooks for courses in teacher communication (speech for the teacher, communication and instruction, classroom communication) provide scant information about listening. A survey of fifteen teacher communication texts reveals that most authors agree implicitly with Donald Ecroyd -- "... to teach is to talk and to learn is to listen...." (preface). Each of the fifteen textbooks was scanned for length, for content focus (usually either speech-oriented or interaction-oriented), and for mentions of listening in either the table of contents or the index. Three books devote a chapter to listening. Nine out of the fifteen textbooks mention listening in their indexes. Out of a combined total of 3,704 pages of text in these textbooks, only 82 pages mention listening, and only 11 pages contain information specifically about teachers' listening (see Appendix 1). Even three prescriptive lists about teachers and listening are focused on the teacher as speaker/sender -- only 2 out of 36 items on those lists deal with the teacher as a listener (Fessenden, 146-147; Graepel, 218; Cooper, 1985b, 64-65). Finally, in a 36 page bibliographical list of "Resources" on classroom communication instruction by David C. Kleiman, one subject category is

> Listening. Suggesting ways in which teachers can become better listeners. (Lynn, p.82)

Not one entry is cited under that listening category.

If prospective teachers are not taught to listen, we cannot expect them to listen automatically when they become certified teachers. Sadly, most teachers do not listen in their classrooms because they do not know how to listen.

Ironically, now virtually all teachers are expected to teach their students to listen. As more school systems move into a competency-based curriculum, teachers without knowledge of the skill are expected to teach listening. If listening, and many other elements in competency-based education, are to be more than mere words on paper, the present situation must change. The entire educational system will have to adjust either by in-service training for practicing teachers or by teaching pre-service students about listening; most likely both approaches will be required (Wolvin, 1984; Rubin, 1985). Lundgren and Shavelson warn,

> It follows that teacher behavior should be related to and contingent upon the teacher's skills and abilities in listening, and that student should be indirectly affected as a result. And, if teacher were to exhibit gross deficiencies in the area of listening skills, the impact of training programs in subsequent functions would be diminished. (p.206).

Learning the skill of listening can no longer be left to chance.

LISTENING INSTRUCTION IS ESSENTIAL

Preparing teachers to listen and to teach listening will require a comprehensive listening program. Listening is a complex, learned skill. A single introductory lesson on the process of listening will not develop the range and depth of listening skill needed in the classroom by teachers.

Teachers need listening instruction at at least four levels, namely:

1. foundation training,
2. training to listen as students,
3. training to listen as students of teaching,
4. training to listen as teachers.

Each of these levels require separate instructional time, together with appropriate periods for review, assimilation and practice.

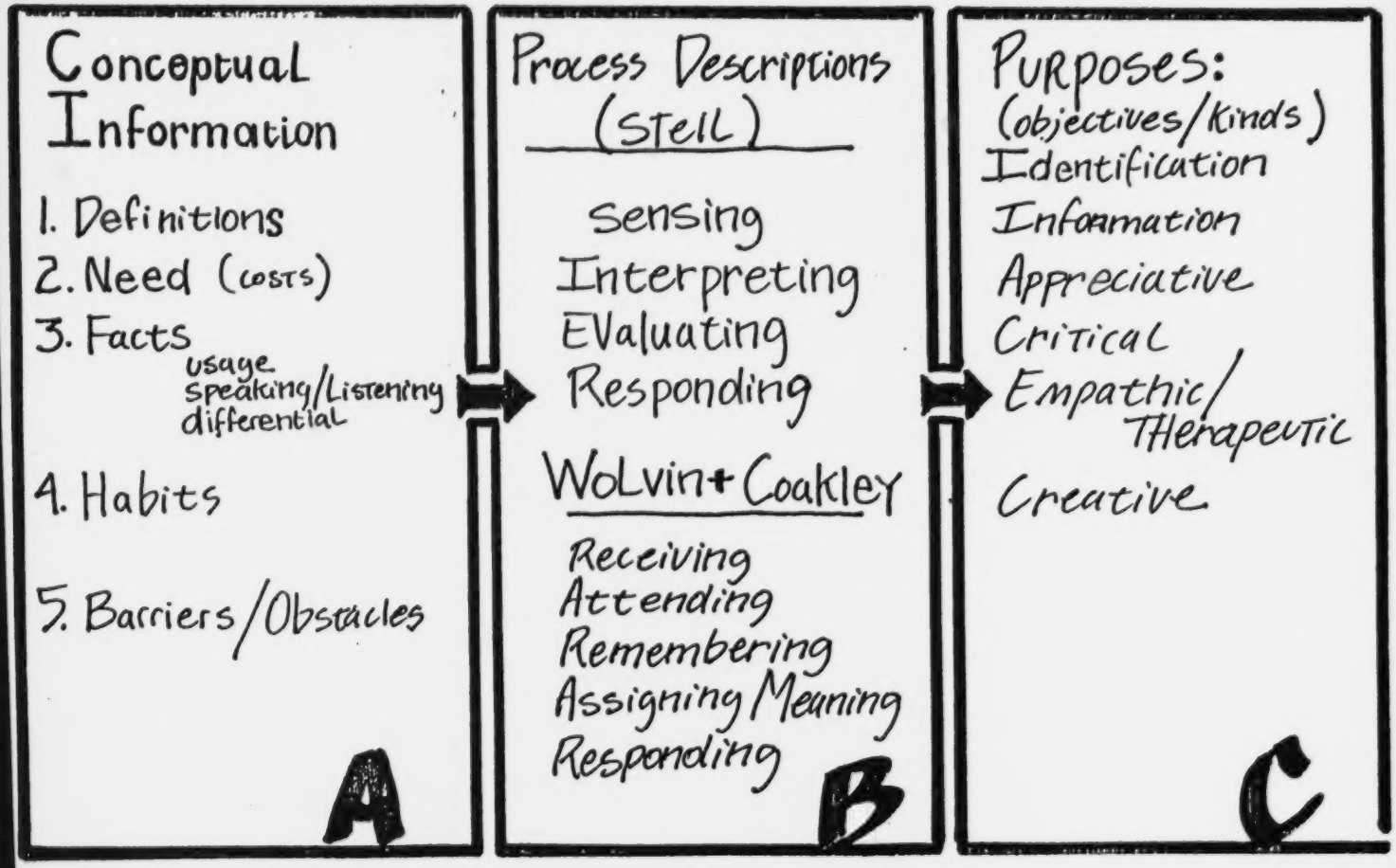
The foundation for listening is found in the process model prevalent in current listening literature [see Figure 3]. That listening improved understanding and guided exercise has been demonstrated amply (Devine, 1978).

Listening as a student is a specialized skill. We can no longer assume that students know how to listen merely because so many teachers have spent so much time talking at them. Without training, most students practice and ingrain bad listening habits. Since the vast majority of learning in school requires extensive and intensive listening abilities, students must be assured the skill with which to listen and learn. Students who get better grades are not smarter; they listen better (Nichols and Stevens, 1957). All teachers need to explicitly reinforce students' listening skill.

As students commit themselves to pre-service teacher education programs, they must be taught to listen (to observe) as students of teaching. Education students cannot sit naively through any class. Their teachers are models. They

Figure #3

THE PROCESS MODEL OF LISTENING



must be able to listen and evaluate each teacher's performance. Only as students learn to evaluate teachers' performances will they be able to learn about the craft and art of teaching.

Finally, pre-service students must learn to listen as teachers. Teachers must listen to relate, to manage and to nurture. Specific knowledge and techniques must be learned in order to listen as a teacher.

IDENTIFYING ASPECTS OF TEACHER LISTENING

The characteristics of teacher listening can be established by identifying the situations, the roles and the purposes of listening as a teacher (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

COMMON LISTENING CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS

SITUATIONS	ROLES	PURPOSES
1. classroom	1. teacher	1. appreciative
2. organizational	2. disciplinarian	2. informative
a. school	3. bureaucrat	3. critical
b. system	4. professional	4. empathic
3. conference	5. counselor	5. creative
a. student		6. nurturing
b. parents		
4. community		
a. adults		
b. children		

(Nurturing is an ability to encourage and support the development of another person. Listening to nurture focuses on three factors -- person, knowledge and learning. In listening to the person, a teacher learns who the other person is and identifies signs of growth and development. When knowledge is in focus, the teacher listens for what a student knows and how that knowledge is used. Finally, in listening for learning, the teacher finds out how the student learns and -- critically -- how the errors in the student's learning maybe worked out. Listening to nurture differs accordingly from informative or critical listening.)

Lessons for teaching students to listen as teachers can be developed for each characteristic or for combinations of characteristics.

A LISTENING MODEL

An alternative framework for training teachers to listen as teachers is grounded in a continuum of listening stances, from defensive to supportive [see Figure 5]. This model is based on the proposition that

<u>We hear what we are, and we are what we hear</u>.

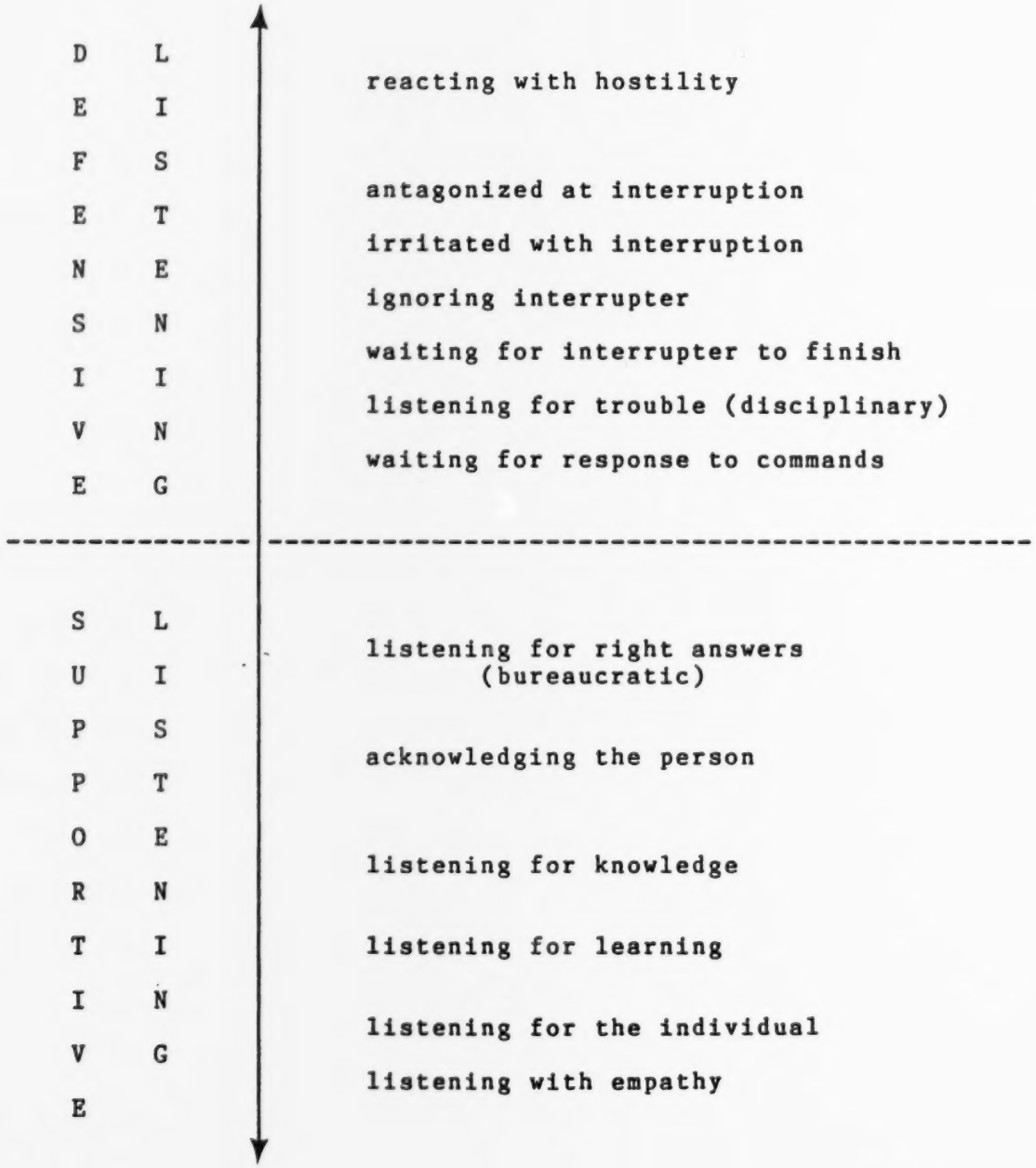
Essentially, the way we prepare ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, to listen (our listening stance) affects what we hear and how we respond. Jack Gibb describes group climate as an atmosphere which the leader can and does affect by his or her responses. The way the leader (in our case, the teacher) listens and responds largely determines the group's behavior. Teachers prepare themselves (assume a stance) to

listen supportively or defensively. Their listening stance affects their responses, which in turn create a supportive or defensive classroom climate.

This model offers students and teachers a perspective from which they can identify their classroom responses, locate their stance and determine how to modify their listening to achieve a supportive classroom.

FIGURE 5

A CONTINUUM
DEFENSIVE TO SUPPORTIVE
LISTENING



CONCLUSION

Listening is probably the most crucial skill in the classroom for both the student and the teacher. Tragically, students and teachers are left to their own devices in learning this critical skill. The school's traditional "inverted curriculum" offers little or no listening instruction. A paucity of research and textbook materials on listening in education reflects the same conceptual inversion. Consequently, few teachers know about the process of listening, or how to listen. As a result, deficiencies in academic performance by students are compounded by teachers who do not know how to listen. Clearly, a systematic listening education program for students and teachers is imperative. The ability of students and teachers to listen can no longer be left to chance.

APPENDIX 1

A SURVEY OF TEXTBOOKS ON TEACHERS AS COMMUNICATORS

Author	Copyright (total pages)	Content	Listening Content
Sorrenson.	1952 (458)	speech	Table of Contents --none Index --- (7 cites) [5 pgs]
Fessenden, Johnson,	1968 (310)	speech	Chpt. 10: "Toward Better Listening" [15 pgs.] Index, (8 cites) [6 pgs.]
Ecroyd.	1969 (175)	speech	"listener" in Expository Speaking [6 pgs.] Index (6 cites) [6 pgs.]
Robinson, & Becker.	1970 (273)	speech	Chpt. 4 "Listening" [18 pgs] Index:(12 cites) [18 pgs.] "Listening in Teaching" [8 pgs.]
Phillips, Dunham, Brubaker, Butt.	1970 (199)	interaction	Table of Contents -- none Index -- (3 cites) [3 pgs.] teachers listening [1 pg.]
Galvin, Book.	1972 (111)	speech	Table of Contents ---none Index --- none
Phillips, Butt, Metzgar.	1974 (244)	speech	Table of Contents -- none Index -- none

SURVEY OF TEXTBOOKS ..... (page 2)

Author	Copyright (total pages)	Content	Listening Content
Bassett, Smythe.	1974 (270)	interaction	Table of Contents -- none Index -- (one cite) [2 pgs]
Friedrich, Galvin, Book.	1976 (86)	interaction	Table of Contents -- none Index -- none
Hurt, Scott, McCroskey.	1978 (204)	interaction	Table of Contents -- none Index -- none
Cooper.	1981 (294)	interaction	Table of Contents -- none Index -- none
Barker.	1981 (165)	interaction	Table of Contents --none Index --none
Klopf, Cambra.	1983 (341)	speech	table of contents -- none index -- (6 cites) [9 pgs.]
Cooper.	1984 - 2nd ed. (366)	interaction	table of contents -- Chpt.3 [16 pgs.] index --(7 cites) [16 pgs.] teachers listening [2 pgs.]
Seiler, Schuelke, Lieb-Brilhart.	1984 (203)	interaction	table of contents -- none index -- none

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